



## MEDIA SERVICES

# UNESCO calls for ban on trade in Haitian artefacts to prevent pillaging of the country's cultural heritage

**UNESCO is launching a campaign to protect Haiti's moveable heritage, notably art collections in the country's damaged museums, galleries and churches, from pillaging.**

The Director-General of the Organization, Irina Bokova, on Wednesday wrote to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, asking for his support in preventing the dispersion of Haiti's cultural heritage.

"I would be most grateful," she wrote, "if you would request Mr John Holmes, your Special Envoy for Haiti and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian affairs, as well as the relevant authorities in charge of the overall coordination of UN humanitarian support in Port-au-Prince – the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the Department of Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO) – to ensure, as far as possible, the immediate security of the sites containing these artefacts."

Ms Bokova further asked Mr Ban to consider recommending that the Security Council adopt a resolution instituting a temporary ban on the trade or transfer of Haitian cultural property. The Director-General also suggested that institutions such as Interpol, the World Customs Organization (WCO) and others assist in the implementation of such a ban.

The Director-General is also seeking to mobilize the support of the whole international community and of art market and museum professionals in enforcing the ban. "It is particularly important," she urged in her letter, "to verify the origin of cultural property that might be imported, exported and/or offered for sale, especially on the Internet."

Referring to UNESCO's previous experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Director-General said she intended to draw on national and international experts to orient and coordinate the assistance required to protect Haiti's cultural heritage. "This heritage," she insisted "is an invaluable source of identity and pride for the people on the island and will be essential to the success of their national reconstruction."

It is important to prevent treasure hunters from rifling through the rubble of the numerous cultural landmarks that collapsed in the earthquake. Among them are the former Presidential Palace and Cathedral of Port-au-Prince, along with many edifices in Jacmel, the 17th century French colonial town Haiti planned to propose for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

The one property already inscribed on the List – the National History Park - Citadel, Sans Souci, Ramiers - with its royal palace and large fortress appears to have been spared by the quake. As were the country's main museums and archives.

UNESCO has already helped salvage the exceptionally rich historical archives of George Corvington, the historian of Haiti. It is also contributing to attempts to rescue whatever panels or significant fragments remain of the remarkable painted murals that decorated the Episcopal Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Port-au-Prince.

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Source: [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco\\_calls\\_for\\_ban\\_on\\_trade\\_in\\_haitian\\_artefacts\\_to\\_prevent\\_pillaging\\_of\\_the\\_countrys\\_cultural/back/18256/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco_calls_for_ban_on_trade_in_haitian_artefacts_to_prevent_pillaging_of_the_countrys_cultural/back/18256/)